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Introduction to *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800)

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INTRODUCTION

The Odyssey of Consciousness

The System of Transcendental Idealism, written late in 1799 and published in 1800, is by far the most polished and complete of the works that Schelling published within his lifetime. In its breadth, clarity and integrity the work justifies the sudden fame it brought its young author. Ironically, this work which for the next decade established Schelling's position at the pinnacle of German philosophy and provided him the platform for elaborating the first system of absolute idealism is far from the most original of his writings.¹ In the main, it belongs to the early works, the philosophical apprenticeship under Fichte. The System, in fact, maintains its continuity with the rest of Schelling's philosophy only in its muted voicing of certain themes which elsewhere attain their proper development--themes such as the reality and ultimacy of nature in an idealistic perspective, nature's function as the ground and anti-type of spirit, the self-identity of the Absolute within dispersed finite being, the conceptual though unconscious element in art, and philosophy's task of constructing a general metaphysics upon the model of human freedom. It is predominantly a work of consolidation, not of Schelling's own previous philosophy, but of the tradition of transcendental idealism, the position suggested in Kant's three Critiques and elevated into an epistemology and general methodology in Fichte's Science of Knowledge. Schelling is clear on the kind of consolidation needed:

The most general proof of the overall ideality of knowledge is therefore that carried out in the Science of Knowledge, by immediate inference from the proposition I am. There is yet another proof of it possible, however, namely, the factual, which in a system of transcendental idealism is carried out in the very process of actually deducing the entire system of knowledge from the principle in question. (System, p. 34)

¹Schelling's System became known to the English-speaking world through Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, which drew heavily upon it and other early essays of Schelling for a forty-page critique of perceptual realism. The adaptation took the form both of direct translation and of paraphrase, with scant acknowledgement of the exact sources. The critic's laxity later gave rise to charges of plagiarism. For a comparison of Coleridge's text and its sources see G. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale, Ill., 1969), pp. 198-221.

Schelling's predecessors had enunciated the principle that the togetherness of subject and object, of presentation and thing, can be founded only in self-consciousness or its constitutive activity, imagination. Fichte called this unitive consciousness the 'self' or the 'I.' What remains is to prove this theoretical position, to see the abstract principle of the subjectivity of all known being verified in a system of idealism. This system would give flesh and substance to the stance of a perceptual and cognitive idealism by demonstrating that the objective world in the totality of its being and its operations is a process of emergence from the self and its activities, most basically presentation. The world in its objectivity, in its sensible singularity and its generality as nature, and also this objectivity spiritualized as the human community living under law, subject to time and history--this whole world is to be constructed from the self's fundamental quality, freedom or activity. "Freedom is the one principle on which everything is supported, and what we behold in the objective world is not anything present outside us, but merely the inner limitation of our own free activity" (p. 35). The system Schelling proposes is to annex to the idealism of this epistemological and metaphysical principle a 'real-philosophy,' a total and faithful account of the objectivity of the physical world and of the human structures of experience and social sharing. Or better, its task is to prove the identity of transcendental idealism and real-philosophy, and thus to elevate transcendental philosophy into an 'ideal-realism' (p. 41).

In his 1827 Munich lectures Towards a History of Recent Philosophy Schelling reluctantly underscores the non-originality of his 1800 System, its dependence on "Fichtean Idealism" and on the principle first enunciated by Fichte that freedom must ground all philosophy. For it was Fichte who discovered that the Kantian autonomy of self founds not only practical or moral philosophy but also theoretical philosophy, the account of knowledge and being (S.W., X, 96).² But the one-time disciple and popularizer of Fichte now maintains that he came to his own method while working under this "cloak of Fichtean thought."³ The essence of this method consists in the clarification "of that which is utterly independent of our freedom, the presentation of an objective world which

²Non-English Schelling references are to the Sämtliche Werke, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 1856 f., reproduced in the Munich Jubilee Edition, ed. M. Schröter, 1927. The first numeral indicates the volume, the second the page.

³Schelling definitively broke from Fichte in 1806, though the two were in substantial disagreement from 1800 on.

indeed restricts our freedom, through a process in which the self sees itself develop through a necessary but not consciously observed act of self-positing" (S.W., X, 97). This process, unnamed in 1800, is now given the name dialectic--Schelling insinuates that credit for the discovery of "the dialectic" is popularly misplaced.

In this dialectic or clarificatory process the positing and self-expanding activity of the self and the limitation of that activity are seen to be both and equally the self's activity. The self is primordially both activity and limitation; inside the process it consciously makes itself to be both, i.e., the self itself makes itself to be both subject and object, finite and infinite. The self is doubled in that it appears to itself; it loses the abstract simplicity of the Fichtean self-positing ($I = I$); it ceases to be in-itself and becomes for-itself. As Schelling explains it in 1827, inside the dialectical process, which is the system, the self returns from limitation to its original freedom and for the first time becomes for itself (or in the System's language, consciously) what it already was in itself, namely pure freedom or activity. Schelling further remarks that this one process makes up the whole mechanism of the system. What in a preceding moment is posited in consciousness (i.e., is admitted as real) only for the philosopher, is in the succeeding moment raised in the self itself; in the end the objective self (the self itself, the subject of experience) is raised to the standpoint of philosophizing consciousness and the two coincide (S.W., X, 98).

That this was indeed Schelling's method and intent is evident from a reading of the System, though often the 'method' seems a clumsy didactic device and hardly the simple mirroring of a process inside consciousness. The claim that this dialectical procedure is his method rather than Fichte's is plainly extravagant,⁴ although the System's main advantage over the Science of Knowledge is the adoption of this one method over the three or four that Fichte variously employs.⁵ It is, at least in

⁴For Fichte's statements on science as the dialectic of the philosophizing and the objective self see Science of Knowledge, tr. Heath and Lachs (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 113, 120-21, 198-202. Also see the "Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge," op. cit., sections 5, 7, and particularly 9 and 11.

⁵In the 1794 Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge the first three sections on the ground-principles employ a deductive approach; the theoretical philosophy adopts an analytic and metaphysical method of exploring the possible factors inside the one real synthesis of experience; the cryptic "Deduction of Presentation" (pp. 203-17) a descriptive and (abortively) synthetic method; and the practical philosophy a method at once synthetic

general form, the same method that Hegel was to take up and perfect in the Phenomenology of Spirit, and not the method alone, but the ordering of the strata of experience determined by it. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to understand the order of experiential levels in the Phenomenology from Hegel's transitions alone, without the pattern of materials inherited from Fichte and Schelling before one's eyes. The pattern of the System indicates the road that Hegel was to follow, viz. from theory to praxis, from the individual consciousness to the objective social order, and from a world-embedded consciousness to a philosophically reflective one. But it shows, too, the Kantian and Fichtean systems which lie at its origin. Here is the System's basic structure:

(1) A general consideration of self-consciousness, dialectic and the methodology of the system--Parts I and II, Part III in part; pages 1-47.

(2) A theoretical philosophy: the deduction of cognitive phenomena ranging from rudimentary (and properly unconscious) presentation up to the categories generally necessary to secure objectivity for experience--Part III, pages 47-154.

(3) A (sketchily outlined) philosophy of nature, contained within the theoretical philosophy, in which cognitive phenomena are seen of necessity to involve a reflection and validation in an objective intuited order, viz. nature--Part III, First Epoch (conclusion) and Second Epoch; pages 83-129.

(4) A transcendental analysis of cognitive and judgmental faculties, again contained within the theoretical philosophy. Here the previous stages of the self's activity, viz. as productive intuition and as matter organized in nature, are seen to be equally grounded in free reflection or self-relation, the activity which in practical philosophy emerges on its own as will--Part III, pages 129-54.

(5) A practical philosophy which advances from the perceptual and volitional solipsism implicit in the theoretical standpoint to a deduction of the rational human community as guarantor both of the objectivity of the world of experience and the ideality (value) of the moral order--Part IV, pages 155-93.

(6) A philosophy of history contained within the practical philosophy and evidencing the objectivity of will, much as the philosophy of nature does in the

and genetic--i.e., once the category of feeling is introduced, we watch the actual growth of consciousness. Ironically, Fichte was to criticize the System for a lack of dialectical rigor. (Letter of the Summer of 1801, Fichte-Schelling Briefwechsel, ed. W. Schulz [Frankfurt a. M., 1968], p. 126).

theoretical philosophy. Here practical philosophy, having deduced the moral, legal and political orders of social existence, finds its subject matter (will) existing as objectified in history and as necessarily and collectively moving toward the ideal fulfilment of world polity--Part IV, pages 193-214.

(7) An extra-systematic concluding section, including a (negligently sketched) teleology and a philosophy of art, wherein certain abiding problems of the system, e.g., the inaccessibility of the Absolutely Identical or absolute self-consciousness, and the recourse to a hypothesis of a pre-established harmony of freedom and determinism, receive a solution of sorts. Aesthetic intuition is seen to be the counterpart of philosophical intuition and to provide an access to the hidden identity which was both the ground and the goal of striving for the consciousness torn throughout the whole dialectic between intuition and production--Parts V and VI, pages 215-33.

The final section is extra-systematic since on the Fichtean model of consciousness--an activity ever-deflected from complete reflection into unconscious and preconscious production--a fully transparent philosophical moment of self-reflection is not possible. The philosophy of art, then, stands as a philosophical epilogue to the System of Transcendental Idealism and the first announcement of Schelling's own system of absolute philosophy, the System of Identity.

The System is a rich and intricate work, and we certainly do not exhaust its significance in mentioning the pivotal place it occupies in speculative idealism's march from Fichte to Hegel, nor even in pointing to the place it holds within Schelling's own philosophical development. Written at the turn of the century, it belongs to two different epochs. Its origin lies in the classic calm of the philosophy of consciousness which dominated European thought from Descartes through Kant; its impulse is toward the uneasy philosophies of will which were to dominate the nineteenth century and which define man, not in terms of the infinite reach of the concept timelessly attained in theoria, but in terms of a dialectic of striving, need and finite fulfilment. Let us look to some of the central philosophical themes that the System raises, problems and positions that the 20th Century reader can still appreciate despite the oddness of, and the general philosophical antipathy towards, the outlook of speculative idealism.

The Primacy of the Practical

Like Fichte, his predecessor and exemplar, Schelling sets out to render the Kantian philosophy clear and cogent. Read with an eye turned back to the Kantian sources, the System seems a compendium of the three Critiques, an attempt to organize Kant's wayward and varying assessments of reason's function in intramundane experience, in moral judgment and in aesthetic/teleological harmonizations of experience, and to gather them under one transcendental deduction.⁶ Like other readers and interpreters of Kant, Schelling is at times overwhelmed by the material he is trying to control and seems not so much to systematize Kant as to be setting didactic expositions of the mechanisms of Kant's understanding alongside his own dialectical treatment of consciousness. In other places he is a more successful interpreter: Difficult as it is, the deduction of presentation as a reality-producing intuition (Part III, pp. 51-93) clarifies the mysterious "merely given" character of the Kantian sensible manifold. And in his insistence upon the central role of time in consciousness, upon its being in fact the basic character of that synthesis of the finite and the infinite which is the self, Schelling rescues Kant's schematism from its obscure hiding place in the text of the First Critique and gives it its proper prominence.

To someone philosophizing after Kant it could appear that, over and above the critical results of the examination of reason, and despite all the cautionary notes, a positive Kantian philosophy was indeed possible. Kant had left a legacy of positive doctrine pointing in the direction of a systematic development--for instance, the ideal of a systematic form for all philosophy and of philosophy's function as a metascience, developed in the Critique's "Architectonic"; the revolutionary notion of transcendental questioning as a methodology; and, in texts drawn from theoretical as well as practical philosophy, a fully positive description of pure reason, operating in and for itself, as a function of self-relation.

Following out these hints of Kant, Fichte took the decisive step toward a speculative criticism in his apprehension that cognition and action are fundamentally the same, that an identity, or better, a striving for identity is the ground and motivation of reason both in cognition and action. Reason strives for self-coincidence.

⁶On the relation of Fichtean idealism to Kant's texts and to a possible system of Kantianism drawn from them, see "Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge," op. cit., pp. 42-62. See also Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," tr. F. Marti, Metaphilosophy, VI, 1 (1975).

The unification of sensible experience into a world, and the further (but for Kant, illicit) unification of experiential concepts into ideas, are but special cases of reason's functioning, which is more basically exemplified in practical reason's struggle to establish and maintain autonomy against heteronomy, independence against external determination. Reason is self-relation and seeks to maintain identity in the face of otherness--this is Fichte's great insight: He concludes his quest to define and clarify the objectivity of the mysterious not-self by saying,

The self, as such, is initially in a state of reciprocity with itself, and only so does an external influence upon it become possible.⁷

And again,

The ultimate ground of all consciousness is an interaction of the self with itself, by way of a not-self that has to be regarded from different points of view.⁸

Reason as act seeks to find and establish itself in the other. This is the heart of the Science of Knowledge and it is this insight which for Fichte, Schelling and Hegel determines the primacy of the practical over the theoretical, the priority of spirit over nature. It is this primacy of the practical, the vision that reason is active rather than passive, that turns transcendental idealism decisively away from the kind of epistemological and ontological preoccupations exhibited by even the Kantian philosophy and toward moral, social and political philosophy, and the philosophy of history. The issue everywhere is freedom, the relative self-sufficiency of a finite spirit, rooted firmly in worldly being. The post-Kantian idealists are not concerned to dispute spirit's anchoring in an objective natural and social world, but they want to see it interpreted in terms of the sufficiency and the life of spirit. They want to view worldly being and its objectivity, not as an absolute and established plenum of being, but as a totality relative to consciousness, as acquiring meaning only in terms of that relation. It is not mute being but meaning that is the standard, and not a meaning rooted in brute being and finding arbitrary expression in language, but a meaning that stems from activity, from that peculiar activity of self-consciousness where act and awareness fully coincide. Thus in Fichte's eyes, and for the tradition after him, cognition as clarified and explained by theoretical philosophy is a limited and unsatisfactory form of self-activity because it is always an activity

⁷ The Science of Knowledge, p. 244.

⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

related to an other--until, that is, it is brought by philosophy to that state wherein it becomes fully self-directed and self-conscious, in will or activity proper.

Both within the System and over the course of his long speculative career, Schelling is basically in accord with Fichte in granting priority to praxis rather than to theory.⁹ The philosophical system, he insists, is itself an act of freedom. It is not a vision of reality passively received, impressed from without, rather it is a free recapitulation of the act of selfhood, the primordial synthesis (p. 49). The philosophical system is primarily about selfhood and its conditions, and has the basic character of an act. There is no question, then, of catching things as they are, of probing the being of things or of doing any sort of ontology: "Being, in our system, is merely freedom suspended" (p. 33). Even the self, the principle of system itself, is not a thing but a postulate; it is not a piece of objectivity lying ready-to-hand, but something that must be enacted. "What the self is, is for that reason no more demonstrable than what the line is; one can only describe the action whereby it comes about" (p. 29).

An idealistic philosophy, so Schelling maintains, can have only a practical basis; it is grounded in the free act of spirit taking itself as central. As such, an idealistic system is, strictly speaking, without any purely theoretical basis; it can call upon no primary datum and educe no proof other than its own free activity. It must in fact attempt to reduce or re-interpret the whole theoretical standpoint in light of free activity: Ultimacy is not to be accorded to the presentation, or to the presentation's objective factor (Kant's sensible manifold), or even to some final ground of givenness (Kant's thing-in-itself). The System, accordingly, undertakes to explain givenness itself as an interplay of conscious and unconscious activities; it reads the obviously non-conscious activity of mechanical and organic nature as equivalent to willing and action (p. 12). To avoid ceding ultimacy to objectivity, it has recourse to a pre-established harmony of sorts, which links free activity and non-conscious production without engulfing the one factor in the other (p. 129). So that spirit shall not be lost in a world of matter and motion, nature is itself spiritualized. Ultimately the standpoint of cognition itself is abolished, its distinctness negated: "What is commonly called theoretical reason is nothing else but imagination in the

⁹ The one notable departure from his lifelong allegiance to the practical and spirit-centered orientation of the Fichtean outlook is the System of Identity of 1801-1806 which is prefigured in the System's concluding sections on history and art. It seeks a model of being not in man's activity but in a quantified and formalistic approach to physical being.

service of freedom" (p. 176).

In the light of the tenuous nature of Schelling's allegiance to Fichteanism at the System's writing, one might be critical of all this emphasis on freedom. He had, after all, been struggling to articulate a philosophy of nature within idealism and had not met with Fichte's approval. Then, too, the System contains many hints of the transition to the realistic metaphysics of the System of Identity, a system patently modelled after Spinoza. Nonetheless, the emphasis upon freedom is genuine, not merely a formal repetition of the Science of Knowledge. From his earliest writings, Schelling was moved by the spirit of Kantian freedom to criticize and methodologically to delimit what then appeared the only consistent metaphysics, Spinozism. (The center of the critical tradition always appeared to be its defense of freedom.) Even in the System of Identity, inaugurated by a work which adopts not only the deductive form of Spinoza's Ethics but a good deal of its naturalistic and deterministic spirit as well,¹⁰ freedom is still of capital importance for Schelling: The existence of quantifiable conceptual shapes (ideas) as sensible particulars is described as a 'fall' from the Absolute, an exercise of 'self-will,' a free act.¹¹ Being, at least in its particular and existential aspects, if not in its eidetic character, is still conceived as activity and life.

In the 1809 Philosophical Investigations of the Nature of Human Freedom Schelling clearly returned to the pragmatic or spirit-centered standpoint of the System. He now interprets all being, in its objective aspects as well as its subjective ones, through categories of willing. He outlines the construction of a total system of philosophy, ranging from a theory of nature to a philosophy of history, upon the complex interplay of dependence and independence in human freedom and upon the moral, social and historical decisiveness of action. "Primordial being is will," maintains Schelling,¹² and, in a deliberately anthropomorphic move, he identifies this primal will with the human exercise of will. Resorting to the theosophical myth of the Creation's inherence in a cosmic Adam, Schelling paradoxically makes being's articulation in cosmogony, its stabilization in nature, and its eventual fulfilment in history the consequences of the emergence of finite spirit. All being bears the stamp of the decisiveness first

¹⁰ The Presentation of My Own System, 1801.

¹¹ See the dialogue Bruno (1802) and Philosophy and Religion (1804).

¹² Heidegger has called this statement the turning point in modern metaphysics. See What Is Called Thinking? tr. Wieck and Gray (Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 90-91. See also Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (Tübingen, 1971), pp. 114-20.

attained by human freedom in the creation of value, in the fashioning of good and evil. A comment in the System evokes the kernel of the 1809 essay, where Schelling suggests that the complex finitude of human consciousness--involving a possible predetermination of the freely determined, the limitation of freedom due to individuality, and the influence of other intellects--is thinkable only in terms of an original act of freedom, an act originative of ontological as well as moral definiteness, determinative of character as well as individuality.¹³

Nor was Schelling's interest in the sovereignty of freedom exhausted in the 1809 essay. All of his later work, from the 1815 Ages of the World to the lectures on mythology and religion of the 1840s and '50s, show Schelling in search of a principle of freedom and actuality not confined to and determined by reality as merely conceived. Freedom must be more than the activity postulated by philosophical thought behind the world as presented and experienced. It must be more than a concept in the domain of the possible, more than the result of thought dialectically playing through all the possible. It must be the origin, the principle of existence and actuality. Freedom is the place where thought (as an interplay of concepts) leaves off and reality begins. The complete system of philosophy, as conceived by the late Schelling, faces a double task--starting from the conceptual, to attain to freedom and, within thought, to give birth to the actual and living subject; then, from the side of existence, to trace its course empirically through history.

In all the phases of his long career, freedom is one of Schelling's crucial and operative concepts. It is prior to all categories, beyond the play of the possible which is the proper concern of metaphysics or theoretical philosophy--the one reality beyond concepts, beyond naming, the touchstone by which to judge the rest of the vision of the universe that a philosophy projects. We know it, as Fichte said, because we are it, we do it.¹⁴ The actual takes precedence over the possible, the practical over the theoretical--not from any conceptual reason or ground, but from our existence as spirit.

System and Facticity

The System of Transcendental Idealism is above all a system, an ordering will toward a comprehensive knowledge. Its single goal, says Schelling, is to discover a system in human knowledge, to determine the principle whereby all individual knowing is determined (p. 18).

Now it was Kant who first brought to light the systematic character of reason and, within the very

¹³ See p. 193 below.

¹⁴ "First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge," section 1; "Second Introduction," sections 3 and 4, op. cit.

discussion of the generally misleading character of reason as a faculty of ideas, underlined its legitimacy. In addition to its function of unifying experiential concepts into pure concepts or ideas, reason pursues an "ideal:" It elaborates a complete system of all possible predicates, arranged in antithetical pairs, and attempts the complete determination of any being which is its object by assigning one member of every pair to it.¹⁵ Every concrete predication logically presumes this total field of predicates; conversely the system of predicates presumes the complete determinacy of every object. Now Kant thinks such a systematic elaboration of transcendental logic both a necessary and a valid procedure. Reason can err only in hypostatizing this ideal, in using it to form the idea of an absolutely determined object which embraces the whole field of predicates, that is to say, God. Later in the First Critique Kant revises his estimate of the legitimacy of the notion of system. Rather than perceiving it as proceeding to an unwarranted hypostatization in the idea of an absolute object, he sees it as the defining and guiding ideal of philosophy. Under this ideal philosophy seeks to combine all systems of knowledge, i.e., all sciences, into one "system of human thought."¹⁶

Fichte and Schelling indeed set out to regularize and systematize the Kantian philosophy, not merely in the sense of bringing the multiplicity of texts (and of philosophical perspectives too) to some unity, but in the sense of pursuing this ideal of reason. Reason--the self as autonomous in the practical sphere, if not in the cognitive--must see itself reflected in the totality of worldly being, must grasp the sum of its self-determinations as the comprehensive specification of the natural and intersubjective worlds' objectivity. It is this total reflexivity of reason that Fichte stipulates as the heart of transcendental idealism:

So what then, in a couple of words, is the import of the Science of Knowledge? It is this: reason is absolutely independent; it exists only for itself; but for it, too, it is all that exists. So that everything that it is must be founded in itself and explained solely from itself, and not from anything outside it....¹⁷

Reason is in essence systematic, an ordering and patterning will to know, a will to discover itself in the known.¹⁸

¹⁵ Critique of Pure Reason, A568-583, B596-611.

¹⁶ Critique of Pure Reason, A832-839, B860-867.

¹⁷ "Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge," op. cit.,

p. 48.

¹⁸ See Martin Heidegger, Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit, op. cit., pp. 31-41.

Schelling initiated his reflections on the possibility of a system of philosophy in his first philosophical essay, written in 1794. Looking into the Kantian notion of system, he sees that system means not only the reduction of a multiplicity to a unity--as in Kant's categories of the understanding, which are all specifications of the one primary concept, relation--but implies a reciprocity of form and content as well. A system is an organism, as it were, in which content and form, subject-matter and methodology, cannot be arbitrarily isolated, but reflect into one another. This organic reciprocity is the hallmark of scientific form.

The notion of system becomes doubly important in the System of Transcendental Idealism, for the work, unconsciously documenting Schelling's move from Fichtean idealism to the "ideal-realism" of the Identity System, has two distinct senses of system in play: (1) The obvious one, inherited from Fichte, of an immanent unification of human knowledge under its principle or guiding process, viz., reflexive self-relation; but (2) system also in the sense of a comprehensive science, a total philosophy comprehending all the different possible perspectives upon reality. System in the second sense comprehends and includes the first, which, limited as it is to the immanent standpoint, is only one portion of the total account. This latter (at least as described, problematically and programmatically, in the System) parallels the transcendental system with a co-equal system of natural science, a philosophy of nature, and contemplates joining the two through a transcendental logic, a metaphysical theory of identity and difference.¹⁹

This duality in working notions of system riddles the whole work and introduces a degree of internal inconsistency. Despite its massiveness and its detail, the System counts as a transitional work in Schelling's own philosophical development, an entr'acte between the Philosophy of Nature of 1797-1799 and the Identity System of 1801 and thereafter.

The Foreword and Introduction of the System essentially look back to the philosophy of nature. They point out the necessary but complementary opposition between nature-philosophy and transcendental idealism, and suggest that philosophy can complete its one task, the exhibition of the work of absolute consciousness, only in a double manner--in paralleling a realism to an idealism, and demonstrating their identical principle. The system-principle these sections suggest seems to be the polar nature of absolute consciousness, which attains actualization in separate real and ideal orders, and thus makes nature and spirit equally primary. They operate, in short, within

¹⁹ The System recognizes and allows only an intuitive approach to this transcendental logic of identity/difference, namely through the philosophy of art.

the second and broader of the definitions of system distinguished above.

The body of the System, comprising the general remarks on transcendental philosophy and the theoretical and practical deductions, is solely a system of transcendental idealism. "My only concern," says Schelling, "is to bring system into my knowledge itself and to seek within knowledge itself for that by which all individual knowing is determined" (p. 18). Here the system-principle is "a universal mediating factor in our knowledge" (p. 15), a reconciliation of identical (or analytic) and synthetic modes of thinking (pp. 22-24)--intellectual intuition. In this context intellectual intuition is not the immediate intuition. In this context intellectual intuition is not the immediate ascent to the Absolute which it will be in the Identity-System, the holistic grasp of the totality. Here in the System, intellectual intuition is the mode of being of the self, of the totality of the known and knowing; the self is said to be intellectual intuition subsistent (pp. 27-28). But precisely as an intuition, this intellectual intuition is insufficiently self-reflexive to be both immediate and total, and thus is from the first, and irrevocably so, sundered into unconscious production and conscious intuition. It seems a paradoxical play of words (and perhaps Schelling's language here is careless and uncommunicative), but intellectual intuition is an unconscious principle of consciousness; our awareness is always an intuition directed back upon a production, i.e. upon a production-intuition, an activity become objectified. In the transcendental system proper, up to the point in the history of consciousness where practical philosophy dissolves into the action of history, no totalization of intuition is possible. Intellectual intuition cannot be realized except as process, as the ongoing flux of our experiencings. Transcendental philosophy cannot ascend to the Absolute Identity as such. The absolute synthesis, the reconciliation of freedom and necessity, lies outside its domain: Schelling can mention it at the conclusion of the practical philosophy only as a regulative idea, in the strict Kantian sense of the term. For transcendental idealism at least, "the opposition between conscious and unconscious activity is necessarily an unending one" (p. 210). As in Fichte's Science of Knowledge, an absolute consciousness, a totalization of intellectual intuition, is postulated as an origin and principle of system, but is unreachable as a result. Fichte himself explained the incongruity of principle and of result, the abiding difference between pure self-positing and lived synthesis, in this fashion.

The form of the system is based on the highest synthesis [of self and not-self, of conscious and unconscious activity]; that there should be

a system at all, on the absolute thesis [the self-positing of the self, intellectual intuition].²⁰

The system of transcendental idealism is a system of the forms of empirical consciousness, whose principle or transcendental ground of explanation is an absolute consciousness. The latter simply cannot appear as an item within the system; it stands behind it as a postulate.

Given Schelling's basic agreement, at least in the body of the System, that absolute consciousness is ineffable, it is odd, and for his future development, quite significant, that the work in conclusion moves beyond the dialectic of empirical consciousness. At this point Schelling advances a metaphysical appendix patterned on Kant's Critique of Judgment. Teleological interpretations of natural phenomena and aesthetic intuition are seen to be immediate and non-discursive approaches to that Absolute Identity which is the ineffable origin and unreachable goal of transcendental philosophy properly so called (viz., the system of human knowing). Schelling cautiously suggests that philosophy as a systematic totality and a metascience can be completed, with a philosophy of art serving as an approach to a pure identity-theory. For art, as Schelling sees it, is a symbolic and necessarily asymptotic approach to the Identity underlying all consciousness. The work of art is a concrete intuition of identity-in-difference, of multiple and inexhaustible meanings packed into one meaning; thus it accomplishes symbolically what philosophy attempts to do discursively--present the totality, exhibit the Absolute. Art thus becomes the sole concrete analogue of intellectual intuition, the one place where producing and intuiting fully coincide. In this appendix, then, Schelling returns to the second and broader of the definitions of system we distinguished. He makes obvious too his abandonment of the Fichtean principle that there is no absolute consciousness outside of empirical consciousness and vice versa,²¹ and in so doing displays a drift toward an absolute and objective system of philosophy, a system again embracing ontology and overstepping the critical-transcendental cautions which would confine philosophy to a phenomenology of consciousness.

It is the destiny of Schelling's whole sixty year long career in philosophy, and in a certain sense its ruin, to again and again confront this ideal of a systematic and properly scientific philosophy, to put it under critical scrutiny, but ultimately to set it aside and reluctantly affirm the factual and discrete character of

²⁰ Science of Knowledge, p. 114.

²¹ See The Science of Knowledge, pp. 108-9, 118.

reality, its irreducible particularity and dispersion. Nietzsche once suggested that it is characteristic of modernity that a thinker cannot write the work, but must undertake an authorship and embrace in perspective and in series that which defies total and direct statement. It is the tension between the leading concepts of system and facticity which inhabits all Schelling's thought and which makes him such a 'modern,' and from the reader's point of view, protean and unsettled thinker.

As Schelling begins consciously to approach the standpoint of an absolute system of reason here in the System of Transcendental Idealism, we see the problem of the equivocal nature of the isolated individual entity arise as well: If everything is most truly in reason (or in the Absolute), how does it exist outside the totality of reason? And whence comes the extra-systematic intelligibility of the particular given in sensory experience?

In 1795 the young follower of Fichte had said that there can be no leap from the absolute and systematic perspective to that of the individual existent, no deduction of the finite (S.W. I, 314).²² And yet he sensed that the whole point of systematic philosophy is to subdue and, as it were, domesticate the otherness that individuals exhibit in their contingent and mutually external existence. Fichte before him had pointed out that philosophy's business is to conceptualize otherness and bring it within the ambit of the self, but the Science of Knowledge is ample proof of the elusive and dialectical character of the undertaking. There Fichte is forced to admit that the whole project seems contradictory, almost unthinkable:

Hence if ever a difference was to enter the self there must already have been a difference originally in the self as such; and this difference, indeed, would have had to be grounded in the absolute self as such.²³

In the System we can already detect Schelling's preoccupation with the factual and discrete character of particulars and see the beginnings of his tortuous, sometimes labored attempts to respect the factual in its uncanny and pertinacious resistance to reason, and, at the same time, to reduce the irreducibly singular to the formula, and, so quantified, to include it within the structured totality that reason articulates. The dialectical, perhaps antithetical, purposes motivating Schelling's vision of systematic philosophy become more sharply outlined in the Identity-System, particularly after 1804.

²²Even in the Identity-System he maintains that position, making the finite particular an ultimate surd. Cf. S.W., VI, 38.

²³Op. cit., p. 240.

The predominant tone of the System, however, is a differential respect for the individual, a prizing of the concrete over the general, a cautious realism. Many times over in the course of the deductions, Schelling gives prominence to a real factor over an ideal one, adopts idealism solely as a methodological stance and prefers an idealistically motivated realism which preserves the phenomena in all their complexity over any metaphysical idealism which would reduce and simplify the richness of experience. For example, in the theoretical philosophy he stresses the second limitation of the self, individuality, and its experiential correlate, time, over the more general limitation to intuiting intelligence and objectivity (pp. 116-17). Further he maintains that everything is at once a priori and a posteriori; the distinction holds only within philosophic reflection, and so all our knowledge is empirical through and through (pp. 151-53). In the practical philosophy he emphasizes that selfhood can be raised to consciousness only as individual selfhood or will; thus the crucial limitation of the self is not its restriction to intelligence, but the third and individuating limitation which poses the will as specified prior to its willing, and posits the self as opposed to and determined by the willing of other selves (pp. 165-69). It is in this third restrictedness, individuation, that the theoretical and practical philosophies find themselves united. For consciousness, in its full concreteness, becomes possible only in simultaneously confronting a definite objective world and interacting with other selves: "Only by the fact that there are intelligences outside me [and thus that I am individual] does the world as such become objective to me" (p. 173). From this focal point the rest of the System's meditations on the paradoxes of the concrete existence of spirit unfold, viz., that choice, conditioned by natural inclination, is the only appearance of freedom (p. 190); that history evidences the free performance of an unconscious and involuntary necessity (pp. 203 f.); that the Absolute itself, or Identity, must be considered equally as free and as necessitated, equally as conscious activity and as unconscious (pp. 208-12). Schelling the idealist shows himself everywhere prepared to turn away from consciousness seeking to grasp itself in the full transparency of thought, and to recognize and respect instead the hard, resisting, opaque and experientially locating features of reality. The strange result: The idealist is forced to accord primacy to the unconscious.

The Dominance of the Unconscious

The moment really characteristic of Schelling's philosophizing in the System of Transcendental Idealism, the moment most in continuity with the rest of his thought, is his insistence upon the unconscious. The principle of system is self-consciousness--or perhaps we might better say, setting aside the contemporary connotation of reflexive self-awareness, self-activity. The self qua system-principle, and not as the delimited focus of empirical consciousness, is originally mere activity (p. 36). It is infinitely non-objective, non-thing-like, for all things are thoroughly conditioned, while the system-principle (reason demands) is to be unconditioned. The self is thus pure inwardness (p. 26), a process and only derivatively a being or a state of a being. It is a continuing self-enactment which, while indeed it comes to light in self-awareness, is not at all circumscribed by it. It is a performance not exhausted in intuition, a continual energizing. The self--or, equivalently, self-consciousness--is essentially self-constituting. Schelling names this self-enactment intellectual intuition.

Intellectual intuition turns out to be a paradoxical concept. It is not properly a cognitive state and thus bears no similarity to any intuition given in empirical consciousness. It is not merely an activity of, or a faculty in, the subject; it is the subject. The self is intellectual intuition subsistent; it exists by knowing itself in this non-objective manner (p. 28). This 'special knowing,' therefore, is more than a mere knowing. It is, as Kant first defined the term,²⁴ an archetypal knowing, a knowing which constitutes as well as cognizes. Now an infinite self or a God would transparently 'know' in this manner, but the self which is the principle of the system of human consciousness is (as Fichte had insisted from the first) an absolute consciousness inside human consciousness, and thus finite. Finitude means that intellectual intuition is not unitary, immediate and fully self-reflected, that self-consciousness is not pure self-awareness. The philosopher in his imitation of intellectual intuition discovers a fragmented consciousness which can be gathered back into itself only through mediation--through experience, reflection, and finally systematic philosophy or its surrogate, aesthetic intuition.

The 'special knowing,' then, which constitutes our consciousness is at one and the same time a sundering of the self's activity into productive and intuitive facets or capacities, the maintenance of this division as, in

²⁴ See "On the Form of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds and Their Principles" (1770), paragraph 10.

principle, a polar opposition, and finally, within time, a stepwise relativization of that opposition in the series of presentations. The self's being (or knowing, or activity) is the coming-to-be of a world for it. Self-consciousness is thus (1) a steady, enduring juxtaposition of conscious (intuiting) activities and unconscious (producing) ones, of activities constitutive of subjective awareness and worldly objectivity respectively; and (2) an ongoing translation from unconscious over to conscious and properly intuiting activity. Since this self-constituting and self-bifurcating self which is the postulate behind the system (pp. 28, 33) does not and cannot appear in empirical consciousness, and since it enacts itself as production prior to and beyond the reach of cognitive awareness, it is largely, in fact dominantly, unconscious.

Fichte, of course, set the terms of this comparison in the Science of Knowledge, but he preferred not to stress, as Schelling does, the absolute contrast between activity (almost by definition unconscious) and awareness; instead he sought to interpose terms connoting both affect and effect between the two--terms like striving and feeling--and thus to effect their mediation. In grounding self-consciousness in an opaque activity which is 'inward' only when internally directed and which, when directed outward, only realizes or produces but does not illuminate, Schelling abandons the old Cartesian ideal of consciousness as complete self-transparency. Fichte had made the same moves, to be sure, but he was reluctant to embrace to the full the consequences of his introduction of finitude into the basic model of consciousness. He transposed the absolute identity of the first ground-principle, excluded from realization in empirical consciousness by the mysterious persistence of the not-self, into a moral ideal. In his hands, the failure of the "is" becomes the justification of the "ought."²⁵

Things are quite different with Schelling. There is a frank recognition of the in principle unconscious nature of the activity of self-constitution. It is significant that the ultimate ascent to the Absolute which Schelling proposes in the System is neither cognitive nor moral but aesthetic, that it is not an eidetic intuition of some sort, nor an intimation of transcendent value, but a symbolic and produced totality of subjective and objective elements residing in the unconsciously produced work of art, which fully reveals the nature of self-consciousness. "[Art] ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious" (p. 231). Art,

²⁵ The Science of Knowledge, pp. 229-30.

thinks Schelling, divines the unconscious and active force behind things and so has priority as a philosophical instrument over both empirical consciousness and theoretical-reflective activity. The idealist of 1799 who speaks in terms of self-consciousness is really not far from the chthonic and irrationalist philosopher of 1809 who was to say,

In the final and highest instance there is no other being than Will. Will is primordial Being, and all predicates apply to it alone--groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation. All philosophy strives only to find this highest expression.²⁶

In the System of Transcendental Idealism the unconscious functions as a kind of absolute principle. It is the opaque knot of actuality in the self, the productive or realizing intuition which opposes the limitant activity (which is the self's) to its properly intuitive activity of cognition and keeps them thus tied together. But this productive element remains hidden, unconscious, and its workings remain forever enigmatic (pp. 78-9). Idealism, thinks Schelling, is forced to admit such an unconscious production and actualization in spite of its allegiance to self-consciousness. For it can in no wise explain the distinction of inner and outer activity, i.e., of the experiential self and the experienced 'thing,' except by analogy to a kind of actualizing intelligence which loses itself (and self-awareness) in its productions, just as the inspired artist loses himself in his work (pp. 74-5). In unconscious producing, real and ideal (i.e., object-constituting and object-intuiting) activities are somehow one; when the cognizing self arrives at awareness of the product, they will be differentiated, but are as yet unseparated. Explanation must stop at this point, for philosophy can only postulate this unconscious producing--the idealistic counterpart of the Kantian ultimate ground of appearance, the thing-in-itself--but cannot elucidate it. It cannot at all illuminate what it must postulate as the basic fact of consciousness, "the infinite tendency of the self to become an object for itself," i.e., to bound its own activity and subsequently to intuit its boundedness as objective, existing and external to itself. "It is not the fact that I am determinately limited which cannot be explained, but the manner of this limitation itself" (p. 59). The manner of this limitation--the concretizing of the self's activity as objectivity which productive intuition effects--is as paradoxical and inexplicable as the self itself: an identity which is

²⁶ Of Human Freedom, tr. J. Gutmann (Chicago, 1936), p. 24; S.W., VII, 350.

not an identity but a synthesis; a synthesis which is not one synthesis but many syntheses packed into one; not a timeless and immediate resolution of the infinite conflicts of its opposed modes of activity, but an indefinitely extended and ongoing partial solution (pp. 45-6, 50). The self, which produces only in order to come to self-identity out of antithetical opposition, can nonetheless produce only as conditioned by this conflict (pp. 113-14). Like the mysterious and dark Indifference of the Identity-System (an absolute identity somehow 'already' differentiated) the self-consciousness which is the principle and subject of the System has a paradoxical and dark side, a hidden ground which is in fact its antitype. At the basis of self-consciousness itself is a knot of pure fact, quite hidden from reason, viz., its origin in and ultimate dependence upon unconscious activity.

It is this centrality of productive activity, and its irreducibly unconscious character, that most illuminates the fatalism which lies at the heart of Schelling's practical philosophy. Transcendental Idealism is a philosophy of praxis wherein activity everywhere predominates over being (or previously determined activity). Yet within the system, Schelling curiously avows, the philosophy of action can only show itself objectively; praxis can appear only as history, as an objective order of world-events, shaped and guided, perhaps, by some teleological impulse toward a universal world-order (p. 4). The subjective and personal aspect of praxis cannot appear; the consciously guided aspect of an individual's activity, the element of personal freedom, cannot appear as act, but only obliquely, as past deed.²⁷ The sole efficacious element in action, the sole objectivity, is an intuiting, and the intuiting appears not as act, but as an intuited, an objective something. The causality of my will, so Schelling maintains, is consumed and exhausted in the construction/intuition of an objective world; there is no possibility of this world's alteration. "We act freely and the world comes to exist independently of us" (p. 182). There is no sense of freedom other than that self-determination whereby I know (and determine the existence of) a world; there is no efficacious altering of reality other than my bringing it forth as a series of presentations and cognizing it. The self, which is will and act, is nothing other than an act of knowing: "The self exists only in that it appears to itself; its knowing is a form of being" (p. 185). More than that, knowing is its only conscious form of being; its originative (and central) activity can be intuited only as past, as the objectivity of a thoroughly determined world. On the level of

²⁷ See the lengthy discussion pp. 177-88 below.

conscious awareness, there is such a thorough-going identity of acting and intuiting that freedom itself is manifested only as a natural phenomenon. Absolute freedom appears objectively only as natural inclination (p. 186).

This is a thoroughly deterministic reading of the human situation of action, one which excludes the notion of a personal and voluntary participation in a moral order. The System's analysis of the ethical situation explains all ethics away, inasmuch as it makes the moral law a subjective necessity (the purely personal ideal of total self-determination) posed over and against the objective necessity of inclination. The only place, consequently, where practical activity can appear as action rather than as response to determination is in the arbitrary choice, which is said to reconcile the conflicting subjective and objective demands (p. 190). There is none of the Kantian exaltation of the moral sphere here, despite the Kantian language the analysis employs. Schelling's intent is to move beyond the ethical, toward the global and objective order of the self's action in history. Only insofar as the active self or will appears, only insofar as it pertains to the world of phenomena, as it is conditioned in and by empirical consciousness, can it be said to be free; "the will itself transcends freedom" (p. 191).

An analysis of history similarly deterministic--wherein events are patterned by the emergence of a drive toward world polity, a drive which in part stems from human cooperation but is in part impelled and necessitated by a higher providential source--moves Schelling to adopt the notion of a hidden Absolute, an Identity behind all conscious exercise of will which is the reconciliation of the highest paradox, the apparent opposition of freedom and lawfulness. The contradictions between freedom and determinism, between the self as intelligence and the self as will, cannot be solved on the conscious level; an ultimate synthesis is called for, beyond all consciousness:

Such a pre-established harmony of the objective (or law-governed) and the determinant (or free) is conceivable only through some higher thing, set over them both, and which is therefore neither intelligence nor free, but rather is the common source of the intelligent and likewise of the free. (P. 208)

Ultimately consciousness is put to one side and made synonymous with appearance, while the hidden Absolute is identified with the irreducibly unconscious element in self-consciousness and with the essential and indissoluble tension between the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious as determinant activity becomes the ground of consciousness and of freedom, a ground never wholly to be clarified and translated into the light of consciousness.

A thorough-going determinism pervades the whole realm of consciousness and freedom becomes mere appearance.²⁸

The opposition between conscious and unconscious activity is necessarily an unending one, for were it ever to be done away with, the appearance of freedom, which rests entirely upon it, would be done away with too. (P. 210)

Radical Finitude, Time and History

In the name of freedom or activity as such, freedom of act is abrogated; on the principle of self-consciousness, individual consciousness is reduced to unconscious activity--the System either veers into inconsistency and paradox of an amateurish sort, or, more probably, points to an essential paradox deep in the heart of its subject-matter, human consciousness. Fichte had grappled with the same paradox in a schematic fashion and concluded that it is at very least odd for consciousness to be sovereignly independent and yet finite. Schelling, we suggest, undertakes a more detailed analysis of the finitude of consciousness, and, child of the Enlightenment though he is, comes closer to voicing the radically finite nature of human consciousness, and the precarious nature of man's career as finite spirit, than ever his predecessor did.

In Schelling's insistence upon the unconscious nature of the self's activity lies an essential ambiguity which he senses, but cannot properly articulate or conceptually resolve. The realm of unconscious activity is equated with the transcendent principle, with an Absolute Identity, which is said to ground all consciousness and selfhood, but which is nonetheless "divided in the first act of consciousness" (p. 209). Is not the classical notion of transcendence relativized in this equation, a notion to which Schelling seems to adhere, especially in his talk of system and the system-principle? A principle behind, perhaps beneath, consciousness is made a principle over consciousness--in a philosophy that is nothing other than a system of human knowledge.

Schelling cautions us, indeed, that questions about this Identity prior to consciousness, prior to the dialectic of conscious and unconscious activity, are ill-formed and inappropriate, "for it is that which can only reveal itself through self-consciousness, and cannot anywhere part company from this act" (p. 234). Nonetheless in the historical perspective, questions do arise about the character of its transcendence, the status of its

²⁸ The freedom, then, which is all that supports this system of human consciousness and is its foundation (p. 35), turns out to be a purely formal freedom, synonymous with activity-as-such. It nowhere partakes of the attributes of conscious awareness and decision which, as Schelling realized in 1809 and thereafter, constitute human freedom.

relative consciousness/unconsciousness: Is it beyond consciousness, like a Platonic form, or beneath consciousness like Schopenhauer's primal will? Is its ineffability due to a surpassing character or to a privative one? It is indeed not clear from the whole of the System whether we are dealing here with a spiritual transcendence, a principle the classical traditions would name a cause of knowing and being known, or with a dark and essentially mute ground of activity or being, a ground only peripherally and fleetingly revealed in conscious awareness.²⁹

Schelling seems midway between a classifical philosophy of transcendence as seen in Plotinus or Spinoza, where ultimate productive agency is indeed unconscious, but unconscious in the manner of pre-eminent and transfinite mentality, and the kind of material transcendence of Will or Being over its finite forms, voiced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and in our day Heidegger. His "unconscious activity" is certainly not the intra-psychic and individual dynamism of conflict that Nietzsche and Freud were to describe, the source of repression, guilt or the life-poisoning "rancor against time." But by the same token it is not the conflict-free and benign principle of Neoplatonic emanation, nor a placid substance beyond knowledge, a resting and complete source of being such as Spinoza describes. It is an activity and a principle of activity. It is in conflict with itself, at least potentially, so that its life can be spoken of as the unfolding of the infinite contradictions implicit within it. Schelling describes it as an act which is an infinity of actions, an absolute self-consciousness never realized definitively and exhaustively in any conscious awareness, but rather the life and source of the whole system of finitude (pp. 49-50). It is a will which realizes itself only in the dialectic of the conscious and the unconscious, a self-finitizing infinity.

In the System's notion of self-consciousness, therefore, we have a transcendent principle curiously transformed and altered. In its very self or its transcendent aspect, absolute self-consciousness or Identity is wholly ineffable. The mechanism explanatory of all other intuitions, the principle of the graduated sequence of intuitions which collectively form the system, remains obscure and unilluminated. We do not see how the principle of the system of human knowledge is an act of knowledge--unless, as Schelling variously suggests, we have a vague adumbration of it as a genus or a type gathered from the

²⁹ A crucial feature of Schelling's later metaphysics, begun with Of Human Freedom (1809) and Ages of the World (1815), is the distinction of two types of causality, the active causality of freedom or decisive will and the kind of material-temporal priority of antecedent over consequent which Schelling calls grounding.

total survey of its instances, in nature as well as in spirit (pp. 2-3), or else fashion some kind of analogy between this supremely active and creative cognition and the fashioning cognition of the artist lost in his work (pp. 75, 230). We can know and recognize some kind of absolute consciousness only in (or in between) the finite forms of consciousness and the succession of those forms. And what we recognize, in fact, is that there must be something like an absolute consciousness, i.e. we know it as a postulate.

Schelling propounds a radically finite model of consciousness and (both in the spirit of Kant and on the model of the fragmentary system of reason suggested by the three Critiques) limits philosophical recognition to the finite modes of knowledge, taken singly and in the contingency of their succession in the "history of consciousness." Before him, Fichte had searched for an absolute consciousness inside empirical consciousness and for some kind of privileged access to it, whereby the heteronomy both of willing and of knowing would be abrogated, and consciousness accede to total self-coincidence; The Science of Knowledge documents the ardor of his search, and its futility. Hegel was again to take up the task in the Phenomenology of Spirit, and with success, for in his stipulation that the principle of consciousness as such is a self-negating, finitizing return to self, rather than the Fichtean identity of self-coincidence ($I = I$), he marries absolute consciousness and finite consciousness--and provides a principle for the succession of its forms, a formula for their flow and transition, a matrix for their generation. It is this step, the transempirical formulation of a principle for the finitude of consciousness and for the succession of its forms, that the System lacks--or that it only programmatically adumbrates. The System's self-consciousness is a plastic, flowing source of our knowledge and its indwelling realization, but it escapes formula, and thus transcends the realm of the intelligible and the expressible. Lacking the self-negation and self-return that Hegel finally ascribes to consciousness, Schelling's self-consciousness remains a principle of activity but not of knowledge. His self enacts the whole succession of finite, empirical forms of subjectivity and objectivity without fully returning to itself, without definitively knowing itself. Spirit--as Schelling was obliged to conceive it from the basically Fichtean standpoint of 1799--does not return to itself. Indeed, as he himself says,

What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which,

marvellously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself. (P. 232)

Yet the spirit remained deluded, locked in the forms of finitude. In its alienation, in its inexplicable odyssey of self-objectification (p. 59), it can never find rest and full return.

The self-consciousness of the System, then, is a finitized transcendence, a real and basically unspiritual activity and source of realization such as Schelling was to later conceive under the names 'ground' and 'unground,' a restless, irresistible and infra-intelligible energization such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were subsequently to describe.³⁰ Its life is essentially succession--productivity splayed forth as time or the alteration of matter in nature, and as social movement and political deed in history--change whose ultimate rational shape or purpose is, if admitted at all, said to be merely postulatory. Unlike the fully self-transparent Reason of the System of Identity and the Absolute Subject of Hegel's system, both of which live in a kind of eternity--the eternity of movement completed, reality fully comprehended and rationalized--the self-consciousness of the System of Transcendental Idealism is bound to time. The subject of the Hegelian system can be said to be fully itself while it is coming to itself, it lives its life as a play in and among appearances. Schelling's self-consciousness, however, is a principle never fully itself, never being but only becoming, essentially dependent upon appearances and the continued succession of appearances. For the author of the System, the self's life is time, and not a mathematicized interplay of eidetic shapes within time. The finite endures and resists inclusion within any arbitrary totalization. The odyssey of consciousness ends, not with any grand rationalization of the universe, nor with the transition to any timeless and final logical language underpinning all, but with a recognition of the finite and fragmented textures of empirical reality and the multiplicity of its partial intelligible schemata.

We are left with a history which equally shows flashes of senselessness and rationality (world political organization), whose goal and purpose cannot finally be decided, and whose paradoxical mixture of voluntary co-operation and external determination even philosophy cannot sort out. We are left with a philosophy insufficiently aware of its principle to determine its own methodology, with a philosophy lacking intellectual intuition and depending instead upon the surrogate of aesthetic intuition. We are left finally, not with a monolithic system of human knowings, but with a multiplicity of intellectual approaches, a multiplicity of natural languages.

³⁰ See Of Human Freedom and 'Ages of the World'.

Science, art and philosophy remain sundered, and so the goal of fashioning one comprehensive metascience is not accomplished. But the solution Schelling envisages to this scandal of plurality is not to reduce and simplify. The System has accomplished all that a general and abstractive approach can do. What is needful now, says Schelling, is a turn to the concrete, the fabrication of a "new mythology,"³¹ the integration of the particularistic 'knowing' of the arts with the conceptual generality of the sciences--a task not to be accomplished in thought alone, or by the philosopher in isolation, but one to be worked out by a "new race, personifying, as it were, one single poet," an accomplishment of history, not of thought alone (p. 233).³²

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³¹A myth or its subject, the god or hero, plays the role of a concrete universal for Schelling. Concepts indicate with empty generality, but symbolic forms with absolute specificity. A myth is its meaning, and all science aspires to that exactitude. See The Philosophy of Art, S.W., V, 407-11.

³²The remark has political overtones. The 'new mythology' might well be the ideology of the Republican polity. Compare Schiller's Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man.